



**Connecticut Farm Bureau Association**

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February 5, 2011

**Testimony in Opposition to:**

**Raised Bill No. 838: AN ACT CONCERNING WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AND LANDS  
CLASSIFIED AS FARMLANDS**

Submitted by: Donald Tuller, President, Connecticut Farm Bureau Association

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*The following testimony is submitted on behalf of the Connecticut Farm Bureau, a statewide nonprofit membership organization of over 5,000 families dedicated to farming and the future of Connecticut agriculture.*

Senator Edward Meyer, Representative Richard Roy and members of the Environment Committee:

The Connecticut Farm Bureau opposes Raised Bill 838. The classification of farmland under PA 490 is critically important to maintaining a working agricultural land base in the state of Connecticut. The intent of the legislation as spelled out in CGS Section 12-107a, Declaration of Policy is to "maintain a readily available source of food and farm products close to the metropolitan areas of the state," To dilute the purpose of 12-107a by adding wildlife management is contrary to the intent of having this farmland classification. Wildlife habitat management and the management of land for agricultural production are different, and often conflicting land uses that are managed for entirely different long and short term objectives. Land that is set aside for wildlife habitat management does not have food or farm product production as its primary objective. We believe that wildlife is mentioned in the state definition of agriculture because farmland attracts wildlife, often resulting in millions of dollars of crop loss to Connecticut farmers. The growing demand for locally grown food and farm products suggests that it is vital that Connecticut maintain and expand its working agricultural land base to meet this demand. Recent UCONN studies highlight the value of Connecticut agriculture on the state's economy and employment.

The current requirement that farmland must be farmed to maintain PA 490 farmland classification is critical to the success of Connecticut agriculture. Many Connecticut farmers would not be viable without their use of rented PA 490 farmland. When farming is not the primary objective, the farmer's goals can be quickly marginalized. In my town of Simsbury, the town is being asked to put a wildlife management deed restriction on some land that it leases to several farmers. Even though they happen to be organic vegetable growers, no one can say, after months of discussion, how that proposed easement will affect them. They are worried that their use of the land will be severely restricted. We use several fields that are managed for birds. The delayed cutting dates required because of nesting, results in poor quality forage that is barely worth the cost of cutting it. While including wildlife management in the 490 farmland classification might seem commendable, I believe that it is unnecessary and will actually be damaging to Connecticut agriculture.

The statutes currently provide for wildlife habitat protection under CGS Section 12-107e which provides for the classification of land as open space and CGS Section 12-107 b further defines the term "open space" to be land which would "maintain and enhance the conservation of natural or scenic resources". PA 490 Open Space is an important classification that fills the void for the protection of open space land that does not meet the

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classification as farmland or forestland such as wildlife habitat. Over 40 municipalities currently provide a current land use tax assessment under PA 490 Open Space to protect natural resources in those communities.

Land suitable for wildlife habitat protection is ideally suited to the open space classification currently available through existing legislation and Connecticut Farm Bureau welcomes the opportunity to educate and work with any Connecticut municipality that is interested in adopting this important tool for open space land protection.